

# OPENING

**Jacob K. Javits**  
**Federal Building Plaza**  
New York, New York



#### COMMISSIONER'S MESSAGE

Great design solves multiple problems. You can witness that fact throughout the public spaces in New York City. The High Line salvaged a meaningful industrial artifact and provided open space for residents and visitors; at Brooklyn Bridge Park, granite pavers serve as kayak launches and protect the shoreline from storm surges; subway stations have been laboratories for both artists and inventors of digital interfaces.

The newly reopened plaza at the Jacob K. Javits Federal Building is the latest example of multitasking in New York's civic realm. Funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act were committed to a much-needed waterproofing of the parking structure directly beneath the plaza. The public servants of GSA advocated for a more user-friendly project, one that could also produce a stunning above-ground renovation with minimal additional expense.

The makers of this plaza deserve equal praise. GSA hired WASA/Studio A in collaboration with landscape architecture firm Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates for the plaza redesign, which it accomplished in lush, sweeping gestures. Paying as much attention to plant species as paving patterns, the design team's meticulous work can be viewed as an extension of Thomas Paine Park's greenery immediately to the east or as a counterpoint to the Javits building's rigorous architecture.

The new plaza also is an empathetic amenity for New Yorkers. Indeed, different seating types accommodate laptop users and lunch breakers, while also controlling traffic flows and discreetly securing the site. Although you would expect nothing less from the minds behind New York triumphs like Brooklyn Bridge Park, Teardrop Park in Lower Manhattan or Myrtle Hall at Pratt Institute, we are immensely grateful to them for applying that same dedication and insight here.

Dorothy Robyn  
Commissioner, Public Buildings Service  
U.S. General Services Administration





REGIONAL ADMINISTRATOR'S MESSAGE

GSA, through the Public Buildings Service, is responsible for federal courthouses, land ports of entry and many other buildings where the business of government takes place. It manages approximately 375 million square feet of real estate housing 1.1 million federal civilian employees. My colleagues and I are honored to provide federal employees in the Northeast and Caribbean Region with workplaces that enhance their productivity. We are also keenly aware that, for federal facilities to be truly public, their design must reflect the aspirations of the communities in which they are located.

As a lifelong New Yorker, I am proud of GSA's many efforts to strengthen my hometown. Our work in Lower Manhattan since 2001 is particularly resonant. We have restored historic buildings, pursued tenancy at One World Trade Center and developed great outdoor space that weaves the federal presence seamlessly into the everyday life of this great city.

The newly reopened plaza at the Jacob K. Javits Federal Building exemplifies public space that is inviting to federal employees, visitors and local residents alike. Since a landscape may be a citizen's only point of interaction with the federal government, then that plaza should be as inspiring as it is useful, and as safe as it is welcoming.

There was no better way for GSA to ensure that reality than to select design teams that integrate our values into the civic realm. In WASA/Studio A and Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates we had that advocate. In addition, construction contractor Fox Industries and construction manager McDonough Balyard Peck helped deliver the design team's vision. I would like to thank them, as well as all the team members behind the newly reopened plaza, for raising our already high standards.

Denise L. Pease  
Regional Administrator  
GSA Northeast and Caribbean Region

< To impart the plaza with a garden-like quality, mature specimens of *Magnolia soulangiana* and various undergrowth were planted within the landforms  
> Marble benches are placed along the curves of the landforms, effectively creating outdoor rooms; furniture shapes accommodate different uses and social interactions





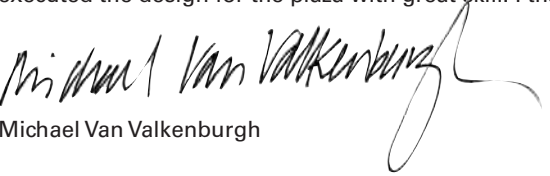
#### LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT'S MESSAGE

GSA's reputation for high-quality, meaningful public spaces is underpinned by a vision statement called the *Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture*. Daniel Patrick Moynihan wrote the document and President Kennedy signed it in 1962.

Remarkably prescient, the guiding principles are embodied in every GSA project. In them Moynihan included the claim, "Design must flow from the architectural profession to the Government, and not vice versa." That certainly happened with the commission to redesign the plaza at the Jacob K. Javits Federal Building, which required overcoming daunting challenges: grading a site to blend with neighboring open spaces, without sacrificing its own identity; reinventing security barriers into compelling landscape elements; devising furniture that accommodates both digital and analog uses. These are uniquely 21st-century questions, and it has been an honor to think through them on behalf of GSA and the American people.

Yet influence flows both ways. Because this project was funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, it had to be completed in record time. To do so, my studio also redesigned its approach to work. We assigned multiple small teams to different aspects of the plaza, and synchronized their schemes to an overarching concept. The truncated schedule forced a process of discovery that was both lightning-fast and highly revealing. GSA has potentially transformed our whole methodology.

Of course, new ideas would not have been exchanged without committed partners. Lead architect WASA/Studio A choreographed the complex effort with aplomb; Leni Schwendinger Light Projects and Carpenter Norris Consulting contributed to the project invaluable; GSA continually championed quality; its peer reviewers, who were coordinated through the agency's renowned Design Excellence Program, offered specific mentorship to that end; and Fox Industries and Kelco Landscaping & Construction executed the design for the plaza with great skill. I thank them, and so will visitors.

  
Michael Van Valkenburgh

< In scale and shape, the plaza's alternating granite and marble paving reflects the pattern of the Jacob K. Javits Federal Building's facade  
> Site plan showing the intersection of Worth and Lafayette streets, with Thomas Paine Park in lower righthand corner

**Owner**  
U.S. General Services Administration

**Design and Construction Team**  
Wank Adams Slavin Associates (WASA/Studio A), Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates, Carpenter Norris Consulting, Leni Schwendinger Light Projects, Severud Associates Consulting Engineers, Mueser Rutledge Consulting Engineers, AKRF, ATC Associates, ConCost Associates, MBP, Fox Industries, Kelco Construction

**Key Credits**  
Angel Ayón, Walter Bishop, Laura Boyton, Marc Brisson, Subhas Chanda, Jeanmarie Dani, Hazel Ephron, Yelena Fayan, Leonard Franco, Julius Gangel, Pamela Jerome, Martin Kapell, Jerry Pessah, Alex Rempel, Sandeep Sikka, Harry Spring, Emily Zwettler (Wank Adams Slavin Associates); Megumi Aihara, Danielle Alexander, Curtis Alter, Peter Arato, Timothy Barner, Jason Benson, Neil Budzinski, Ana Chiari, Emily Cregg, Zachary Culbreth, Inge Daniels, Christopher Donohue, Joshua Egnatz, Nik Elkovitch, Christopher Gates, Kenneth Gifford, Elizabeth Gilbert, Rachel Gleeson, Emily Gordon, Jesse Gregg, Andrew Gutterman, Kerrie Harvey, Devin Hefferon, Adrienne Heflich, H. Nyunny Kim, Tyler Krob, Kate Larsen, Tzufen Liao, Matthew Liparulo, Katherine Liss, Elise Mazareas, Emily Mueller de Celis, Stephen Noone, Nicholas Pevzner, Martin Roura, A. Paul Seck, Brett Seelman, Gullivar Shepard, Jason Siebenmorgen, Sarah Siegel, Elizabeth Silver, Laura Solano, Laryssa Stecyk, Scott Streeb, Matthew Urbanski, Michael Van Valkenburg, Antonia Wai, Emily Walker, Angela Wu, Jonathan Zack (Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates);

Greg Bloxham, Eric Chenault, Courtney Hewitt, Joseph Legros, Leni Schwendinger, Fiona Wong (Leni Schwendinger Light Projects); John Baranello, Michael Lynch, Daniel Surret, OliverThiessen (Severud Associates Consulting Engineers); B. Star Davis, Joseph Di Dio, Davidson Norris (Carpenter Norris Consulting)

**GSA Regional Project Team**  
Cindy Badolato, Charlotte Cohen, Eric Cook, Veneta Dontcheva, Jo Goldberger, Juan Gonzalez, Robert Granato, Wendy Kalan, Renee Miscione, JoAnn Petrillo, Jaime Quinones, Thomas Polet, Ali Tabar, Patricia Wright

**Design Excellence Peers**  
Thomas Balsley, Gunny Harboe, Debra Lehman-Smith, Samina Quraeshi, Robert Rogers

**Site**  
The plaza encompasses 1 acre at the Jacob K. Javits Federal Building at 26 Federal Plaza, in the Lower Manhattan section of New York City. It abuts the federal building’s exit, which includes employee entrance. While the residential neighborhoods of Tribeca, Chinatown and Battery Park City surround the site, its immediate vicinity is entirely populated by civic buildings.

**Background**  
The project repairs faulty waterproofing that has leaked into an enclosed garage since 1960. WASA/ Studio A led the effort, including installation of redundant waterproofing systems, and leveraged

the necessary infrastructure upgrade to improve the exterior public space. Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates designed the new landscape, plaza, fountain and furnishings.

**Design Narrative**  
Large gestural landforms punctuated by saucer magnolias create a welcoming presence at the street edge; plantings, water, paving and benches animate interior plaza spaces. Material selection and pavement pattern, in concert with different types of outdoor vignettes, transition between the enormity of the federal building and the intimate scale of the plaza’s internal gardens. A number of existing site elements are integrated into the plaza design, such as an air-intake structure reclad and illuminated to complement the building. Existing structure was repaired and reinforced where new soil loads exceeded original capacity.

**Topography**  
The plaza sits at a relative high point, creating a plinth for the block occupied by the Jacob K. Javits Federal Building. The plinth also is a result of the underground parking garage intersecting with existing city topography. Designed landforms address the sloping edge of the site by smoothly folding over the plinth edge to meet the street; a grand stair of Stony Creek Granite emerges from the rolling landforms.

**Programming**  
The plaza design provides a hierarchy of spaces, which hold the potential for both programmed and unprogrammed uses. They may be filled by farmer’s

market stalls, movable tables and chairs, concessions and performance.

**Materials**  
Vermont Danby Marble and Stony Creek Granite paving; Vermont Marble seating; bronze trash receptacles and railings; *Magnolia soulangiana* with an understory of evergreen shrubs and groundcovers



Photography: Elizabeth Felicella (opp. 1)  
Alex S. MacLean (2–3, 8)  
Kyle R. Brooks (4, 6–7)



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